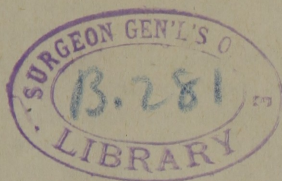


Griffith (Mrs (M.L.))



ANTE-NATAL INFANTICIDE.

PUBLISHED BY THE ASSOCIATION FOR MORAL EDUCATION, OF
WASHINGTON, D. C.



ANTE-NATAL INFANTICIDE.

This crime is, and may well be, horrifying to every right-thinking person. It is well that doctors of medicine and divinity are striving to rouse the public conscience concerning it. To those who have the slightest knowledge of the disgusting and degrading details of such a crime—who have any reverence for helpless human life, or any conception of the ruinous effect on womankind—no denunciation of the practice can be too severe. Indeed there is an inwardness to this matter which the average masculine medical mind seldom penetrates. Those who look at it from a man's standpoint merely—who have failed to comprehend how august and how potent is the mother's office—do not show us one of the darkest depths of the evil. When we comprehend how the emotions of the mother are transferred to the brain and body of the developing child, by a process which has been compared to electrotyping, and that these impressions are stamped upon the enduring substance of an immortal spirit—to grow with its growth and strengthen with its strength—we are dumb with horror at the thought that, failing to murder her child, the unnatural mother may make of it a murderer.

We must deplore the fact that even a *desire* to be rid of its little life should enter the mind of the mother of an unborn child. But is there not some strange but potent cause for this desire, which we are told prevails so alarmingly? Is it not remarkable that women should exhibit such a perverted, unnatural and cruel propensity? If there is anything in womanhood essentially womanly—anything which floods will not drown and fires will not scorch—it is the mother-instinct. If

there be left a shred of womanhood, however defrauded and defaced, you will find in it a fibre of motherliness. It is the bottom fact—the latest stronghold of natural womanhood.

Fatherhood is nothing to it. Men know we are speaking God's truth when we say that the love of paternity, sweet and strong as it is, is weak and slight compared with the desperate, deathless, infinite love of a mother for the child she has borne—a love which grasps heaven and withstands hell; which laughs at torture and death; which surpasses the love of husband and the love of life, and only is surpassed by God's love. Then why do they find it necessary to rise to the seat of the teacher and the judge over us in this thing? How have they dared to do it without first finding out whether sin did not lie at their own doors? They see but one ray of the truth. They are doctoring away at the ugly excrescence, while the seat of the disease lies far within. They have missed, with their lofty and lordly gaze, the whole conception of the dignity of womanhood and motherhood, and the necessities and the immunities it entails.

There may be frivolous, heartless women, the product of atrocious systems of education, who are exceptions, but that the average married woman everywhere loves and desires children, and is afflicted if denied them, we defy contradiction. Which is more really grieved—not in the *pride* but in *heart*—the husband or the wife if childless? What decent woman does not flame at the insult that if free to choose, women would be barren? I have noted these things for years—both interest and position being favorable to observation—and women everywhere have turned to me the eye of Coleridge's mariner, and poured upon me their confidence, (not complaints;) and I have to say that scarcely one woman who has done so but is a sufferer from her marital relations, not from her criminal selfishness.

Take one instance. A wife married when almost a child, and in order to overcome the very reasonable ob-

jections of her mother, a promise was given by the husband that she should never suffer from too early or too frequent child-bearing.

This wife became a mother in less than a year, and has ever since had children as fast as nature could develop them regardless of promises and of her unavoidable dread of such excessive burden. Before the birth of the last, to console the indignant wife and persuade her to some degree of willingness, the husband promised that no other child should be called into existence till she so desired. But it soon appeared that the husband expected this state of things to be maintained, not by his unselfishness at all, but by the wife's use of artificial methods. The wife begged her husband to spare her, (at a time, we believe, when a disabling malady prevented her from helping herself,) but the result was as heretofore. Was it any wonder that outraged, insulted nature should avenge herself in crime? Criminal abortion was the only escape which this wronged woman saw—as it is for so many others. Is there not food for thought here? And this was the wife of an excellent physician of high standing in his community.

Go to any intelligent and kindly physician who has for years attended the bedsides of women; ask him how many women have conceived children when disease, or infirmity, or constitutional weakness, or exhaustion, or excessive and too closely following maternities, have made horrible conditions for them and prepared a horrible heritage for their children. Ask him how many little children have died because the mother could not give them life-force enough to live. Ask him how many have been born with incurable taints of body, or mind, or soul. Ask him how many times he has given his warning that another maternity would be *fatal*—and given that warning *in vain*—and consider whether there be not a page in this volume of horrors for men to peruse!

Guiteau's mother was not the only woman who has

borne child after child while an invalid confined to her room. No condition of either parent—physical, mental, moral, or social—no pressure of distressing circumstances, no unfitness nor unwillingness of the mother, no conceivable obstacle which would be considered insurmountable in any other transaction, but the demands of carnality have overleaped. Even the certainty of insanity, or the necessity of the Cæsarian operation has proved no bar. It is recorded in English medical history that one woman submitted to the operation seven times. Any other scripture seems more keenly appreciated than the injunction that the husband love his wife, as his own body.

Now consider the reverse of this picture, which, though dreadful, is drawn by no hasty or prejudiced hand. We are setting down facts merely. Imagine the newly-married pair reverently and lovingly conferring upon this matter. Imagine their reaching some adequate conception of the import of generating a new immortal, and of the careful preparation of mind and body, and spirit and condition, which should precede an act so solemn and important; imagine the young husband solicitously inquiring whether his wife should be able safely to pass through such a crisis; imagine, if you can, such instances, which though rare, are not unknown; be it set down to the glory of humanity that he, realizing the dignity of womanhood and motherhood, leaves her free to elect when she shall take such supreme peril and supreme privilege upon herself; and fancy the surprise, the gratitude, the joy, the abandonment of devotion with which a wife would meet such a sacrifice of love!

Ah! men little know what they are missing by living upon the present level of selfishness, thoughtlessness, and animalism. Talk of wifely submission, there is no submission like that of reverence, gratitude, love, and perfect confidence; and yet such a state of things as we have described is no more than a wife's absolute *right*. We use the word in its highest, holiest, strongest sense.

A right is right all round the circle. You cannot lay one wrongful touch upon motherhood but you mar a coming generation. Bind the mother with chains, and you beget a race of slavish creatures. It has been well said—only in maternity can the conditions necessary to maternity be decided. The mother is an artist of immortal destinies. In her hand lie mighty issues ; within her sphere are the fountains which feed the eternities ; but what can she do if she is herself crippled, hampered, tortured, exhausted, degraded, held down to a ministry revolting to every pure instinct ?

Great souls cannot be generated under servile conditions. Sound bodies cannot be begotten of exhaustion.

Said a young mother—a woman pure and sweet as a lily—the gentlest, tenderest, truest of wives—a woman who would have died a hundred deaths before she would have laid her hand to a sin: “Before my first child was born I was so glad, I loved her before ever I saw her; even the little clothes were such a pleasure to me, and though I suffered so, I was so glad to welcome her. But when a second came so soon, and I so weak and worn, indeed I couldn’t feel as if I wanted it.” And the poor little soul soon left a body too weak to hold it. Fathom, if you can, the shadow under which such a child must come into the world. Think of the sadness stamped upon a soul which its own mother can not welcome. Oh, my friends, if a child can receive nothing else, has it not a right to a welcome entrance into life? Disinherited childhood—what pen or tongue can tell all the meaning of the phrase! The wrongs of womanhood are bitter—but think of defrauding a child, before its birth, of health, of peace, of happiness, of the ordinary sweetness of a human spirit. Think of binding upon its helpless nature a burden of disease or pain or sorrow, or crime! One woman—begotten under the most abject conditions, at which her mother could not but rebel—said to me, “I lived in sin nine months before I was born.”

Remember that exhaustion and disease, and a thou-

sand unfit conditions, do not prevent conception. It is possible for a woman to bear children so excessively, and so close together, that she absolutely dies of over-production, and the children either precede her, or travail through a death in life. No ordinary woman, at least under the present condition of things, can bear a child every one or two years, and not break down herself, or produce caricatures of humanity. Considering that so many women find the conditions of maternity heaped with every degrading, disgusting, and distressing associations, accompanied with every manifestation of selfishness, and that husbands themselves so often instigate the crime, it is little wonder that women lose sight of the sacredness of the office—forget that little innocent lives are involved, and criminally seek to escape from what to them seems nothing but the consequences of lust. The remedy lies chiefly with men. Educate women, by all means, to better knowledge and higher views of these vital subjects. When have they had any education of this sort? Well may men bow their faces to the ground and hide their mouths in the dust, and cry “unclean! unclean!” rather than stand up in their self-righteousness, and cast the first stone at women. Let them cast out the beam from their own eyes. Let them rise to a plane of purity and unselfishness and nobility of manhood. Let them cease to pamper every animal instinct by stimulating foods and drinks—by alcohol and tobacco poisons. Let them cease to regard women as their subjects—the ministers of their lower natures—and rise to some conception of the purity and majesty of a woman’s nature and a mother’s office; and then shall this violence cease off the earth. Happy homes—not childless, fewer children but better, and happy, loving wives, will make a new paradise of earth.

“Then comes the statelier Eden back to men.
Then reigns the world’s great bridals, chaste and calm:
Then springs the crowning race of human kind.
May these things be!”

MRS. M. L. GRIFFITH. ✓

